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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to develop a coordinated, statewide plan to improve academic advising, a survey of the services provided by 25 public institutions in Maryland was conducted. Respondents from 23 of the 25 institutions returned the questionnaire, nine from four-year colleges and 14 from two-year colleges. Data were analyzed by percentages and chi square tests at the .05 level. Sixty percent of the institutions said they had a written document describing their academic advising policies. The documents most often dealt with the issues of who did the advising, who was the responsible coordination person, and the relationship of advising services to other support systems on campus. Respondents indicated that 40 percent used a centralized academic department, and 15 percent specified they had a mixed model of faculty members and professional staff. Only one institution in the four-year college groups used graduate assistants as advisors. Other issues related to advising and the implications for a statewide improvement effort are discussed briefly.
(Author/LB)

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A SURVEY OF ACADEMIC ADVISING MODELS USED BY
MARYLAND STATE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Shelly Ann Peabody, Joseph F. Metz, Jr.,
and William E. Sedlacek

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Summary

In an attempt to develop a coordinated, statewide effort to improve academic advising, a survey of the services provided by 25 public institutions in the State of Maryland was conducted.

Respondents from 23 out of the 25 institutions returned the questionnaire, nine from four-year colleges and 14 from two-year colleges. Data were analyzed by percentages and chi square tests at the .05 level.

More than half of the institutions(60%) said they had a written document describing their academic advising policies. The documents most often dealt with the issues of who did the advising, who was the responsible coordination person, and the relationship of advising services to other support systems on campus. Respondents indicated that 40% used a centralized academic advising system, 35% relied on faculty members in individual academic departments, and 15% specified they had a mixed model of faculty members and professional staff. Only one institution in the four-year college/university group used graduate assistants as advisors.

Other issues related to advising and the implications for a statewide effort to improve advising were discussed.

Academic advising appears to be one of the most important, yet least understood or attended to, phenomena in higher education. In a study of graduating seniors at the University of Maryland, College Park, they most frequently reported relating to the school through their academic affiliation, thus accentuating the point that a primary focus for student services is through academic advising.

In an attempt to begin to develop a coordinated, State-wide effort to improve academic advising, a survey of the services provided by twenty-five public institutions in the State of Maryland was conducted.

The questionnaire items were based on Crockett's (1978) list of basic elements in different academic advising models. Specifically, the items focused on official advising policies, advisor selection procedures, in-service training opportunities, quality and frequency of advisee contacts, recognition and reward system, and amount of perceived administrative support.

Results

Respondents from twenty-three out of the 25 institutions returned the questionnaire, nine from four-year colleges and fourteen from two-year colleges. Data were analyzed by percentages and chi square tests at the .05 level.

More than half of the institutions (60%) said they had a written document for description of their academic advising policies. Those documents most often dealt with the issues of who did the advising, who was the responsible coordination person, and the relationship of advising services to other support systems on campus. Less often, the document focused on advisor selection, training evaluation, and reward systems.

With regard to the nature of their advising service, respondents indicated that 40% used a centralized academic advising center system, 35% relied

on faculty members in individual academic departments, and 15% specified they had a mixed staff model of faculty members and professional staff. Interestingly, only one institution in the four-year college/university groups used graduate assistants as advisors.

When asked about requirements for students to see advisors, half of the respondents indicated they had requirements for either all or specific subgroups of students. Students were most often assigned a permanent advisor. The more flexible notion of appointment with any available advisor was allowed less often. When asked to rank order frequency of the advisors' job tasks, the frequency order from most to least often done was: helping students to choose courses to fulfill requirements, to solve scheduling and registration problems, to choose a major program, to explore vocational/career goals, and to explore life goals (least often).

Respondents reported that professional advising staff were more often judged by specific criteria than were faculty members. Respondents most often said that if faculty were advisors, they were not chosen to be advisors by criteria, since advising was then assumed to be within the role of being a faculty member. Professional advisors' performance was more often evaluated by specific criteria than was the faculty's performance. When asked to list the three most important characteristics of a "good advisor," a variety of responses were listed. The three most often listed for "most important" were: having factual knowledge, having listening skills, and being interested in advising.

Most respondents (57%) reported visible and useful administrative support for their advising services, while 26% were unsure, and 22% felt they did not receive administrative support. Results indicated that two-year colleges were more inclined to use professional advisors in a centralized advising service, while the four-year institutions more often used faculty in individual

academic departments as advisors. However, two-year colleges were significantly less likely to assume that advising was a regular part of the faculty role.

Conclusions

An overall inspection of the results suggests a trend toward a general model of academic advising. The concept of having a written policy document which addressed and clarified specific issues was apparent. The traditional idea of academic advising being done by faculty members in individual departments continued to play a dominant part in academic advising on many campuses. However, a centralized academic advising center system using professional advisors also appeared to be used often by a number of institutions, either as an alternative or in addition to the faculty. The professional advisors more often than faculty had to meet specific selection criteria as well as be evaluated by specific criteria. When judging how much visible and useful administrative support there was for each institution's academic advising service, the respondents indicated that although there was some support, there was much room for improved understanding of and support for this campus service.

While it is apparent that there is a great variety of philosophies and programs of academic advising in the State, there appears to be a basis for sharing information among the schools and the possibility of developing a statewide effort for improving advising. Toward this end, the Office of Undergraduate Advisement at the University of Maryland, College Park, plans to sponsor a workshop based on the results of this survey.

References

- Crockett, D.S. (Ed.) Academic advising: A resource document. Iowa City, Ia.: American College Testing Program, 1978.